

Office Alive with Hazards

When we think of workplace safety, we usually see a worker dressed in coveralls wearing a hard hat, safety glasses, and other assorted safety equipment. That worker is usually surrounded by all types of heavy equipment and machines or related obvious hazards, but what about the not-so-obvious hazards that may occur in other areas?

We seem to think accidents that happen in the shop will magically disappear at the office door. However, we all know that is not true. It is not unusual to hear of office workers tripping over a typewriter cord, pulling a telephone down on their big toe, or straining a muscle trying to move or lift a heavy piece of office equipment.

The office does have its share of potential problems, but many of these problems can be eliminated by following good office-safety practices.

Office Traffic:

- Wet floors may be slippery, so walk on them with extra care.
- Walk—never run.
- Passageways should be kept clear of tripping hazards such as wastebaskets, cartons, electric cords, open drawers, ladders, and personal belongings.
- Torn carpets, loose or curled mats, liquids spilled on floors, light failures, or any other condition that could cause tripping or slipping should be reported immediately to your supervisor.

Stairways:

- Use handrails. Take one step at a time, keep to the right, and do not hurry.
- Do not store or throw anything on steps or stairways. Even a piece of paper, a paper clip, a cellophane wrapper, or a match can create a slipping hazard.

Elevators:

- Walk—do not run—for an elevator.
- Watch your step when entering or leaving your car because the car may not be completely level with the ground when the doors open.
- Do not attempt to stop automatic elevators with your hand. Wait for the next elevator.

File Cabinets:

- File drawers as well as desk and cabinet drawers should be closed when not in use.
- Files should be placed far enough away from doors or passageways so they do not interfere with exit routes.
- Place the heaviest load in the lower drawers.
- Open only one file drawer at a time.
- When shutting a drawer, grasp the handle to avoid finger injuries.

Paper:

- Use caution when folding or handling paper—it can cut.
- Use paper clips or staples to fasten papers together. Be sure staples are fully closed.
- Use a staple remover to remove staples.

Electrical Equipment:

- Electrical outlets should be located so that cords do not cross aisles or passageways.
- Electrical equipment should be properly grounded to prevent shock.
- Electrical devices should be periodically inspected for safety. Damaged or worn electric cords should be replaced immediately.
- Never tamper with electric equipment.

Machines and Equipment:

- Machines with exposed moving parts must have appropriate guards.
- Do not operate a machine until you are properly trained. If you operate a machine, dress suitably for the job. Loose sleeves, neckties, even long hair can get caught in moving machinery.
- Properly constructed paper cutters in good condition require common-sense precautions. Keep your fingers away from the knife when it comes down. Keep the knife in the down position when not in use. Loose guards or springs should be repaired immediately.
- When using or refilling staplers, keep your fingers away from the operating part.
- Typewriters should be securely mounted so they do not "crawl" because of the vibration. On a sidewall desk, be certain that the typewriter shelf is firmly supported when the typewriter is in use.

Storage:

- Use a suitable ladder or platform for reaching high objects. Do not stand on a chair , carton, or other substitutes.
- Heavy objects should be stored near floor level.
- Anything worth keeping should be stored in an appropriate place. Store materials in cabinets or rooms designed for this purpose, and keep them orderly.
- Knives and scrapers should be sheathed before being placed in drawers. Razor blades should not be used as substitutes.
- Pointed objects, such as scissors, should face away from you.
- In general, flammable liquids and paint should not be stored in office areas. Flammable liquids necessary for various document-reproduction methods should be limited in quantities and must be stored in approved metal containers and kept away from heat.

Housekeeping:

- Good housekeeping should be emphasized as a vital safety and health measure.

Pedestrians:

- If your job calls for travel on plant roadways, be especially alert for vehicle traffic. When leaving a building, look both ways before entering the roadway.
- Always walk to the side of the road. Walk—do not run.
- Round blind corners cautiously. Obey barricades and caution signs.
- Remember, a backing vehicle has obstructed vision.
- Do not jump from loading docks, platforms, or other elevations.

Joggers and Walkers

- When utilizing sidewalks be aware of uneven surfaces. The Concrete blocks will start to rise this time of year.
- If running on Grass be alert for Mole holes or sink holes.

Miscellaneous:

- Turn on the lights before entering a dark room or corridor. Report locations that are inadequately lighted.
- To avoid falling, do not tilt back in a straight chair, do not lean back too far in a swivel chair, and do not overreach.
- Do not lift beyond your strength. When heavy items are to be moved, arrange for necessary help and proper trucks or other material-handling equipment. If an object to be handled may cause cuts or splinters, wear gloves.
- All sharp edges, splinters, slivers, and burrs on furniture or equipment should be removed promptly. Protruding nails should be removed or turned down.
- Do not carry pencils behind your ear or between your fingers with the point toward the palm of your hand.
- Do not remain at your desk or workplace when overhead work is being performed.
- Horseplay can cause injury and should not be tolerated.
- If work assignments require you to enter plant areas, be certain that you wear eye protection and any other protective equipment required.

Accidents Can Happen Anywhere

You work in an office. That's a safe place to work, isn't it? Not necessarily. Accidents can happen to anybody, anytime, if they act in an unsafe manner or are exposed to an unsafe condition.

Here are a few examples of actual accidents that resulted in injury and lost time to office workers—people just like you and me:

- A clerk in an insurance company was returning to work after lunch when she slipped and fell on a stairway. The steps were wet because snow had been tracked in.
- A bookkeeper burned her left arm and side when she was disconnecting a coffee urn. The urn tipped and spilled hot coffee on her.
- A file clerk suffered a back strain when a fellow employee fell over backward, landing on top of her as she was squatting to get cards out of a file drawer.

- An office clerk tripped over an exposed telephone cord in her office and fell, catching herself with both hands as she hit the floor. She broke her arm and sprained her wrist.
- A secretary pulled a chair up to a lunch table. She caught her little finger on one of the wires on the bottom of the chair, breaking her finger.
- An office employee was going through a revolving door when someone else pushed the door faster. The door caught her right heel and leg, causing a blood clot in her leg.
- An employee dislocated his arm when he suddenly moved it while playing cards on his coffee break.
- An employee was trying to open an office window. He was pushing against the glass when the window broke and his hand went through the broken glass, cutting his wrist.
- A receptionist slipped on a newly waxed lunchroom floor and fell, bruising her back.
- An office employee was running through the company parking lot, stepped on a stone, and fell. She suffered a contusion to her lower back.
- Professional movers brought in a new desk for an employee. She was not satisfied with the positioning of the desk so she moved it and ruptured a disc in her back.
- A receptionist yawned while at work, and her jaw locked.
- A secretary got up from her desk to go to a file cabinet. She tripped over a telephone box installed in the floor and strained her back.
- An employee left a cup of coffee on his desk. When he returned to finish it, he didn't notice a bee inside the cup. The bee stung the inside of his upper lip.
- A clerk was running to catch an elevator. As she stepped into the elevator, she fell and sprained her right ankle. The elevator had stopped about one foot below the floor level.
- A receptionist sat down on a couch that needed repair. She fell through the seat cushion onto the floor, injuring her back.
- A secretary stood up to move from her desk to another, tripped on a desk drawer that had been left open, and sprained her lower back.
- A secretary dropped a pencil on the floor and hit her head on the edge of the desk as she picked it up.

Let's remember that any of these accidents could have happened to you or to me. So, if you see someone acting in an unsafe manner, tell him about it. If you

see an unsafe condition, report it. Safety is everybody's business.